

Leland Carl Zerbe (1930 – 2020)

Leland Zerbe was a key member of the Santa Fe Trail Association Heart of the Flint Hills Chapter. He, along with Don Cress were instrumental in organizing the trail rides along the Santa Fe Trail. His love and pride of the Santa Fe Road was evident as he volunteered numerous times to help on trail rides and participated in the "Voices of the Wind People" pageant, a play about Council Grove, the Kanza people and the Santa Fe Trail. Leland belongs in the Hall of Fame just as he belonged on a horse on the Santa Fe Trail.



Leland Carl Zerbe was born April 12, 1930, on a farm south of Alta Vista, Kansas. Leland graduated from Alta Vista High School in 1948 and joined the United States Navy and was stationed in San Diego, CA. He returned to the Alta Vista area and went to work for Beech Aircraft at Delavan, KS. He later helped construct and manage Western Grain Mill in Council Grove, managed the Council Grove Livestock Auction and was Morris County Weed Director until retirement. Leland enjoyed sports in high school and was active in Council Grove Jaycees and played many baseball games with them. He was active in the community with Rotary Club, was an officer and a board of director on Flint Hills Rural Electric Cooperative Association and President of the board of Flint Hills Development, helping to bring the first satellite TV dishes to the area. Leland was involved as a volunteer for the Heart of the Flint Hills Chapter of the Santa Fe Trail Association for decades. He served on the Trail Ride Committee, and both planned and participated in trail rides throughout his membership. Over the years, he rode the trail by horseback across Kansas and into New Mexico. He also participated in the historical pageant, Voices of the Wind People. During some of the early performances he, along with other trail riders, were a part of a pack train, with horses, that crossed the stage several times during each performance. Leland was also mentioned in several issues of the Santa Fe Trail Association's quarterly publication, Wagon Tracks. Leland had a lasting impact on other trail riders. Years after Leland was no longer able to volunteer, Leland's grandson, Alex Zerbe, was approached at work by Anthony Bunting, who had recognized the Zerbe name and had participated in trail rides as a boy. Anthony remembered Leland's kindness, and he shared a story of a time when Leland had shared his lunch with him during a ride. One of Leland's favorite things was riding a good horse, several of which he trained. Every year he helped gather cattle for the Rotary Cutting Horse contest. During one contest, he won a watch for best cutter in the local cowboy division, of which he was quite proud. He helped many ranchers gather cattle off Flint Hill pastures, one year commenting he had helped gather and load enough cattle to fill over ninety (90) semi-trucks in that summer alone. Having a farm shop was another joy, where over the years he built or reconstructed many pieces of farm equipment, often welding a broken machinery part for a neighbor. Later during retirement, he would build cowboys, bucking bulls and many other items out of horseshoes. Leland's love and passion for horses and trail riding survived his Alzheimer's diagnosis. Though many memories faded, he would often retell stories of his trail riding days to his family, with clarity, and try convincing them to bring him a horse to keep outside the window of his room at Diversicare of Council Grove, Kansas until he passed away on December 9, 2020 at ninety (90) years old.

Submitted by Mark Eric Brooks